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ABSTRACT

This report presents data from the Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1991 and 1997; Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 1989 and 1996 ; Survey of Adults on Probation, 1995; National Adult Literacy Survey; and Current Population Survey. Correctional populations were less educated than the general public. Numbers of prison inmates without a high school education increased from 1991-1997. Three-quarters of state prison inmates did not earn a high school diploma. The main reason that jail inmates dropped out of school was behavior or academic problems. Most state prisons offered educational programs. Over half of inmates reported taking an educational program since their most recent prison admission. Women in state prisons were better educated than men. Minority state prison inmates were less likely than Whites to have a high school diploma or GED. Young inmates were less well educated than older inmates. Inmates with military service were better educated than those who had not served. Over 60 percent of noncitizens had not completed high school or a GED. About 66 percent of state prison inmates with learning disabilities, and 47 percent of drug offenders, did not complete high school or a GED. Inmate unemployment before admission varied with education. Less educated inmates were more likely than educated inmates to be recidivists. (SM)

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Bureau of Justice Statistics
Special Report

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Education and Correctional Populations

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About 41% of inmates in the Nation's State and Federal prisons and local jails in 1997 and 31% of probationers had not completed high school or its equivalent. In comparison, 18% of the general population age 18 or older had not finished the 12th grade.

Between 1991 and 1997, the percent of inmates in State prison without a high school diploma or GED remained the same — 40% in 1997 and 41% in 1991. Of inmates in State prisons, 293,000 in 1991 and 420,600 in 1997 had entered prison without a high school diploma, a 44% increase.

Over 9 in 10 State prisons provided educational programs for their inmates. Half of State prison inmates reported they had participated in an educational program since their most recent admission to prison. About a quarter of State inmates had taken basic education or high school level courses, and almost a third, vocational training.

Data for this report were taken from the Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997 and 1991, the Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 1996 and 1989, and the Survey of Adults on Probation, 1995, sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the Current Population Survey, 1997, sponsored by the Bureau of

Highlights

Educational attainment for correctional populations and the general population

Educational attainment	Total incarcerated	Prison inmates: State	Prison inmates: Federal	Local jail inmates	Probationers	General population
Some high school or less	41.3%	39.7%	26.5%	46.5%	30.6%	18.4%
GED	23.4	28.5	22.7	14.1	11.0	...
High school diploma	22.6	20.5	27.0	25.9	34.8	33.2
Postsecondary	12.7	11.4	23.9	13.5	23.6	48.4

... Not available.

• 68% of State prison inmates did not receive a high school diploma.

• About 26% of State prison inmates said they had completed the GED while serving time in a correctional facility.

• The groups of State prison inmates who had not completed high school or the GED included:
40% of males and 42% of females
27% of whites, 44% of blacks, and 53% of Hispanics
52% of inmates 24 or younger and 35% of inmates 45 or older
61% of noncitizens and 38% of U.S. citizens
59% with a speech disability, 66% with a learning disability, and 37% without a reported disability
47% of drug offenders
12% of those with military service and 44% with no military service.

• Although the percentage of State prison inmates who reported taking education courses while confined fell from 57% in 1991 to 52% in 1997, the number who had participated in an educational program since admission increased from 402,500 inmates in 1991 to 550,000 in 1997.

• The following groups of State prison inmates had participated in an educational program since their most recent admission to prison:
54% without a high school diploma, 60% with a GED, 42% with a high school diploma, and 43% with postsecondary education
52% of males and 50% of females
49% of whites, 54% of blacks, and 53% of Hispanics
58% who were 24 or younger and 47% of those 45 or older
54% of noncitizens and 52% of U.S. citizens.

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Labor Statistics, and the National Adult Literacy Survey, 1992, sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics.

In personal interviews with nationally representative samples of inmates in State and Federal prisons and local jails and of persons on probation, respondents were asked about past educational achievements and recent educational experiences, as well as about their offenses, criminal history, and other characteristics.

The National Adult Literacy Survey, another personal interview survey, assessed the literacy levels of persons in the general population and included a short questionnaire about personal characteristics, including educational attainment.

The Current Population Survey (CPS) primarily collects monthly data on labor force participation from a nationally representative sample of the civilian noninstitutional population. In March of each year the CPS also collects additional information, including educational attainment.

In addition, some information on educational programs conducted in correctional settings from the BJS Census of Local Jails, 1999, and the BJS Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities, 2000 and 1995, has been used (see *Methodology* for further information on these data).

Correctional populations less educated than the general population

Correctional populations — including State and Federal prison inmates, local jail inmates, and probationers — differ substantially in educational attainment from persons 18 and older in the general civilian noninstitutional population.

Correctional populations report lower educational attainment than do those in the general population. An estimated 40% of State prison inmates, 27% of Federal inmates, 47% of inmates in local jails, and 31% of those serving probation sentences had not completed high school or its equivalent while about 18% of the general population failed to attain high school graduation (table 1).

Persons in correctional populations were more likely than those in the general population to have passed a test which indicates the same level of knowledge as those with a high school diploma. The Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials of the American Council on Education develops the General Educational Development (GED) test for persons who are not enrolled in a school. The test assesses academic skills and knowledge expected of high school graduates. Employers and educational institutions usually accept the GED as the equivalent of a high school diploma.

For a quarter of State prison inmates, a fifth of Federal inmates, a seventh of jail inmates, and a tenth of probationers, as for about 4% of the general population,* passing the GED testing process was the highest level of education they attained.

Participation in college-level courses or post-secondary vocational classes was less common for those in correctional populations than for persons in the general population. An estimated 11% of State prison inmates, 24% of Federal inmates, 14% of jail inmates, and 24% of probationers attended some college or other postsecondary institution compared to 48% in the general population.

*National Center for Education Statistics, National Adult Literacy Survey, 1992, "Adult Literacy in America," table 1.1, page 18.

Table 1. Educational attainment for State and Federal prison inmates, 1997 and 1991, local jail inmates, 1996 and 1989, probationers, 1995, and the general population, 1997

	Prison inmates							
	State		Federal		Local jail inmates		Proba-	General
Educational attainment	1997	1991	1997	1991	1996	1989	tioners	population
8th grade or less	14.2%	14.3%	12.0%	11.0%	13.1%	15.6%	8.4%	7.2%
Some high school	25.5	26.9	14.5	12.3	33.4	38.2	22.2	11.2
GED*	28.5	24.6	22.7	22.6	14.1	9.2	11.0	...
High school diploma	20.5	21.8	27.0	25.9	25.9	24.0	34.8	33.2
Postsecondary/some college	9.0	10.1	15.8	18.8	10.3	10.3	18.8	26.4
College graduate or more	2.4	2.3	8.1	9.3	3.2	2.8	4.8	22.0
Number	1,055,495	706,173	88,705	53,677	503,599	393,111	2,029,866	192,352,084

Note: Probationers have been excluded from the general population. General population includes the noninstitutional population 18 or older. Detail may not add to 100% due to rounding.
*General Educational Development certificate.
...Not available in the Current Population Survey.

Sources: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997 and 1991; BJS, Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 1996 and 1989; BJS, Survey of Adults on Probation, 1995; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, March supplement, 1997.

Numbers of prison inmates without a high school education increased from 1991 to 1997

The percentage of State inmates without a high school diploma remained about the same between the 1991 and 1997 prisoner surveys. About 40% in 1997 and 41% in 1991 did not have a high school diploma or GED. In Federal prisons, 23% in 1991 and 27% in 1997, a small but significant increase, had not finished.

An estimated 420,600 State prison inmates in 1997 and 293,000 in 1991 did not have a high school education or a GED — over a third more in 1997 compared to 1991. In Federal prisons, almost twice as many, 23,500 in 1997 and 12,600 in 1991, fit that category.

Three-quarters of State prison inmates did not earn a high school diploma

Inmate survey respondents who did not complete high school were asked if they had received a GED. Respondents who had completed the 12th grade or who had attended college-level courses or post-secondary vocational classes were asked if they had a high school diploma or a GED. All inmates who completed less than 12 years of schooling and those who received a GED were classified as not completing high school. About 75% of State prison inmates, almost 59% of Federal inmates, and 69% of jail inmates did not completehigh school (table 2).

About 35% of State inmates, 33% of Federal inmates, 22% of jail inmates, and 11% of probationers had successfully passed the GED. Of those with a GED, at least 7 in 10 State and Federal inmates obtained their GED while incarcerated.

Jail inmates and the general population reported why they dropped out of school

Approximately 1 in 6 jail inmates dropped out of school because they were convicted of a crime, sent to a correctional facility, or otherwise involved in illegal activities.

Over a third of jail inmates and a sixth of the general population said the main reason they quit school was because of academic problems, behavior problems, or lost interest. About a fifth of jail inmates and two-fifths of the general population gave economic reasons for leaving school, primarily going to work, joining the military, or needing money.

Most important reason for dropping out of school	Local jail inmates	General population
Behavior or academic problems or lost interest	34.9%	17.2%
Family or personal problems	16.4	18.6
Convicted of crime, sent to correctional facility	11.1	...
Involved in illegal activities	4.8	...
Went to work or the military	13.0	23.9
Financial problems	8.8	15.3
Pregnancy	3.7	6.4
Other	1.1	17.7
No reason	6.3	0.9

Note: General population includes persons 18 or older.
...Not available.

Sources: BJS, Survey of Inmates in Local Jail, 1996; National Center for Educational Statistics, National Adult Literacy Survey, 1992.

Table 2. High school completion, for State and Federal prison inmates, 1997, local jail inmates, 1996, and probationers, 1995

High school completion	Prison inmates		Local jail inmates	Probationers
	State	Federal		
Completed high school	25.5%	40.6%	31.1%	58.4%
Did not complete high school[a]	74.5	59.4	68.9	41.6
Earned GED[b]	34.8	32.8	22.3	11.0
Since admission	8.3	9.4	...	...
Other incarceration	17.4	14.0	...	...
Outside prison/jail	9.1	9.4	...	...
Did not earn GED	39.7	26.5	46.6	30.6

Note: For the Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities and the Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, all respondents, regardless of educational attainment, were asked if they received a GED. For the Survey of Adults on Probation, only those respondents who had not completed 12th grade were asked if they had a GED.
Detail may not add to total due to rounding.
... Not available.
[a]Included in those who did not complete high school were inmates who completed less than 12 years of schooling and those who received a GED.
[b]General Educational Development certificate.

Sources: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997; BJS, Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 1996; BJS, Survey of Adults on Probation, 1995.

Educational attainment is defined as the last completed year of school

The definitions and numbers in this report are as consistent as possible with those of the National Center for Educational Statistics and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Persons who did not complete a full year of college were classified as persons with a high school diploma, and seniors who did not complete their last year were coded as having some college but no college degree. Any person with 12 or fewer grades of school and a GED were included in the group with a GED.

Some numbers in this report may differ from those in previously published BJS reports for which other definitions were used.

9 in 10 State prisons offer educational programs

About 9 in 10 State prisons, all Federal prisons, and almost 9 in 10 private prisons provide educational programs for their inmates (table 3). These facilities generally hold persons sentenced to at least a year in prison, giving inmates a long period to concentrate on achieving educational goals. By contrast, local jails house persons from arraignment through conviction and for short sentences. Approximately 6 in 10 local jails provide educational programs for their inmates, even though jail inmates generally stay for short time periods.

The percent of State and private prisons offering educational programs to their inmates increased from 1995 to 2000. In 1995, 88% of State prisons and 72% of private prisons provided educational programs; in 2000, 91% of State prisons and 88% of private prisons offered educational opportunities. During this period all Federal prisons offered courses.

Secondary education programs, which focus on preparing for the GED, were the most prevalent type of courses in 2000. Over 8 in 10 State prisons, almost all Federal prisons, about 7 in 10 private prisons, and over half of jails offered high school level classes. Next most common were classes in basic arithmetic and reading, with 8 in 10 State prisons, almost all Federal prisons, 6 in 10 private prisons, and 1 in 4 local jails offering basic education programs.

In State prisons between 1995 and 2000, the percentages of prisons offering classes increased for basic education (76% to 80%), high school courses (80% to 84%), and special education programs (33% to 40%), while the percentage with college classes went down (31% to 27%).

Vocational training, special programs designed to train participants for a job, were reported by 56% of State prisons, 94% of Federal prisons, 44% of private prisons, and 7% of local jails.

Over half of inmates reported taking an educational program since their most recent prison admission

Many inmates have taken advantage of educational opportunities while they were incarcerated. About 52% of State prison inmates, 57% of Federal inmates, 14% of jail inmates, and 23% of probationers said they had taken education classes since admission to a correctional facility or their most recent sentence to probation (table 4).

Table 3. Educational programs offered in State, Federal, and private prisons, 2000 and 1995, and local jails, 1999.

	State prisons		Federal prisons		Private prisons		Local jails
Educational programs	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	1999
With an education program	91.2%	88.0%	100.0%	100.0%	87.6%	71.8%	60.3%
Basic adult education	80.4	76.0	97.4	92.0	61.6	40.0	24.7
Secondary education	83.6	80.3	98.7	100.0	70.7	51.8	54.8
College courses	26.7	31.4	80.5	68.8	27.3	18.2	3.4
Special education	39.6	33.4	59.7	34.8	21.9	27.3	10.8
Vocational training	55.7	54.5	93.5	73.2	44.2	25.5	6.5
Study release programs	7.7	9.3	6.5	5.4	28.9	32.7	9.3
Without an education program	8.8	12.0	0.0	0.0	12.4	28.2	39.7
Number of facilities	1,307	1,278	*	*	242	110	2,819

Note: Detail may not add to total because facilities may have more than one educational program.
*Changed definitions prevent meaningful comparisons of the numbers of Federal facilities, 1995 and 2000.

Sources: BJS, Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities, 2000 and 1995; BJS, Census of Jails, 1999.

Table 4. Participation in educational programs since most recent incarceration or sentence, for State and Federal prison inmates, 1997 and 1991, for local jail inmates, 1996, and for probationers, 1995

	Prison inmates					
	State		Federal		Local jail	
Educational programs	1997	1991	1997	1991	inmates	Probationers
Total	51.9%	56.6%	56.4%	67.0%	14.1%	22.9%
Basic	3.1	5.3	1.9	10.4	0.8	0.4
GED/high school	23.4	27.3	23.0	27.3	8.6	7.8
College courses	9.9	13.9	12.9	18.9	1.0	6.1
English as a second language	1.2	..	5.7	...	...	...
Vocational	32.2	31.2	31.0	29.4	4.8	7.0
Other	2.6	2.6	5.6	8.4	2.1	3.4
Number of inmates	1,046,136	709,042	87,624	53,753	501,159	2,055,942

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding or inmates' participation in more than one educational program.
...Not available.

Sources: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997 and 1991; BJS, Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 1996; BJS, Survey of Adults on Probation, 1995.

State and Federal inmates had higher participation rates in 1991 than in 1997. In 1991, 57% of State prison inmates and 67% of Federal inmates said they had taken educational courses since entering prison.

Though the rate of participation decreased, the number of State prison inmates educated in prison increased 37% — from 402,500 in 1991 to 550,000 in 1997 — and the number of Federal inmates increased 39% — from 36,200 to 50,300. At the same time, the total number of inmates in State prisons increased 49% and in Federal prisons 65%. Participation in prison education programs did not expand as rapidly as the population, and as a result the percentage of inmates in educational programs fell.

Vocational programs and high school or GED preparation classes were most popular. About a third of State and Federal prison inmates had participated in vocational training to learn particular job skills. About a quarter of prison inmates took high school level classes. Among jail inmates, 5% had vocational training and 9%, high school classes.

State prisoners without a high school diploma were more likely to have taken classes since admission

Prison educational resources were concentrated on those with the greatest need — those without a high school diploma. Approximately 54% of State inmates who had not completed the 12th grade and 61% with a GED reported that they had participated in educational programs since being admitted to prison (table 5). In contrast, about 4 in 10 with a high school diploma or postsecondary courses participated in an educational program.

More than a third of those who did not have a high school diploma or GED took high school classes, and a quarter participated in a vocational training opportunity. About 28% of those with a GED were enrolled in a high school program and 44% were in vocational education.

Table 5. Participation in educational programs since most recent admission, by educational attainment, for State prison inmates, 1997

	State prison inmates with –			
Educational programs	Less than high school diploma	GED	High school diploma	Postsecondary/ college
Total	53.5%	60.4%	42.0%	42.8%
Basic	6.4	1.4	0.8	0.4
GED/high school	36.1	28.0	4.6	2.0
College courses	0.7	16.5	13.5	18.9
English as a second language	2.0	0.6	0.9	0.6
Vocational	24.3	43.7	31.8	31.6
Other	1.5	3.1	3.3	4.2
Number of prison inmates	413,759	298,912	214,439	119,027

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding or inmates' participation in more than one educational program.

Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

Women in State prison were better educated than men

Women in State prisons were more likely than men to have received a high school diploma or attended an institution of higher learning. About 36% of women and 32% of men had graduated from high school or attended a postsecondary institution (table 6).

Women in State prison were more likely to have completed high school than men and less likely to have passed the GED. Approximately 30% of women and 25% of men received high school diplomas; 28% of women and 35% of men had a GED. About 4 in 10 men and women failed to graduate from high school or pass the GED test.

About half of female and male inmates had participated in an educational program since admission. About 21% of women and 24% of men took high school or GED classes; 30% of women and 32% of men were enrolled in a vocational program.

Table 6. Education, by gender for State prison inmates, 1997

	Percent of State prison inmates	
	Male	Female
Educational attainment		
8th grade or less	14.3%	13.6%
Some high school	25.3	28.2
GED	28.9	22.3
High school diploma	20.4	21.6
Postsecondary/ some college	8.8	11.2
College graduate	2.3	3.1
High school completion		
Completed high school	25.2%	30.3%
Earned GED	35.2	27.9
In prison/jail	26.3	15.9
Ouside prison/jail	8.9	11.9
Educational programs		
Total	52.0%	50.1%
Basic	3.1	3.3
GED/high school	23.6	21.3
College	10.0	9.1
English as a second language	1.2	0.5
Vocational	32.4	29.5
Other	2.5	3.8
Number of prison inmates	989,419	66,076

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding or inmates' participation in more than one educational program.

Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

Minority State prison inmates were less likely than whites to have a high school diploma or GED

Minority State inmates were generally less educated than their white peers. About 44% of black State prison inmates and 53% of Hispanic inmates had not graduated from high school or received a GED compared to 27% of whites in State prisons (table 7).

Minorities were less likely than whites to have attended college or some other institution of higher learning. About 1 in 10 blacks and 1 in 13 Hispanics had studied beyond high school compared to 1 in 7 whites. Minorities were also less likely than whites to have earned a high school diploma or a GED: 26% of blacks and 17% of Hispanics, compared to 30% of whites, had a high school diploma; 30% of blacks and Hispanics passed the GED compared to 43% of whites.

Prison staff had concentrated educational services to those most in need of further learning. Higher percentages of blacks and Hispanics, compared to whites, had taken educational classes in prison — about 54% of blacks, 53% of Hispanics, and 49% of whites. About a quarter of minorities were enrolled in high school or GED classes while 34% of blacks and 29% of Hispanics took vocational training.

Table 7. Education, by race/Hispanic origin, for State prison inmates, 1997

	Percent of State prison inmates		
	White	Black	Hispanic
Educational attainment			
8th grade or less	10.9%	11.7%	27.9%
Some high school	16.3	32.4	25.1
GED	35.2	24.8	24.7
High school diploma	22.8	21.0	14.9
Postsecondary/some college	11.4	8.4	5.5
College graduate or more	3.5	1.6	1.9
High school completion			
Completed high school	29.9%	25.5%	17.2
Earned GED	42.9	30.4	29.7
In prison/jail	30.0	23.2	23.4
Outside prison/jail	12.9	7.2	6.3
Educational programs after admission			
Total	48.8%	53.8%	52.6
Basic	2.1	3.3	4.8
GED/high school	18.7	26.1	25.4
College	12.4	9.0	7.1
English as a second language	0.1	0.1	6.4
Vocational	32.0	33.7	29.1
Other	3.0	2.5	1.8
Number of prison inmates	351,742	490,384	179,301

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding or inmates' participation in more than one educational program.

Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

White, black, and Hispanic male inmates ages 20 through 39 were markedly less educated than their counterparts in the general population

Males between the ages of 20 and 39 dominate the State prison population; they constituted about two-thirds of all State prison inmates in 1997. Approximately 21% of the State prison population were white males between the ages of 20 and 39, 33% were black males in that age range, and 12% were Hispanics. In the general population these groups constituted a significantly smaller percentage of the total population — 22%. White males ages 20 through 39 were 17% of the general population, and blacks and Hispanics of any race about 3% each.

Within the 20 through 39 age group, male inmates consistently had lower academic achievement than their counterparts in the general population. Young white and black male inmates were about twice as likely as their counterparts in the general population to have not completed high school or its equivalent — (14% versus 28% for whites and 16% versus 44% for blacks). Young Hispanic males' educational achievement did not differ by such magnitude; 52% in prison and 41% in the general population did not have a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Four times as many young males in the general population as in the prison population had attended some college classes or postsecondary courses — 54% of whites in the general population and 11% in prison, 44% of blacks in the general population and 8% in prison, and 32% of Hispanics and 7% in prison.

Educational attainment of males, ages 20 through 39, by race/Hispanic origin, for State prison inmates and the general population

	Percent of males ages 20 through 39 by race/Hispanic origin					
	White		Black		Hispanic	
Educational attainment	General population	State prison inmates	General population	State prison inmates	General population	State prison inmates
8th grade or less	4.3%	9.9%	2.3%	9.9%	20.9%	24.1%
Some high school	9.6	17.8	13.3	34.0	20.4	27.7
High school diploma	32.1	61.0	40.5	47.9	27.0	41.6
Postsecondary/some college	30.7	9.3	32.4	7.1	22.8	5.3
College graduate or more	23.4	1.9	11.5	1.1	8.9	1.4

Note: Probationers excluded from general population. Detail may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Sources: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, March supplement, 1997.

Young inmates were less well educated than older inmates

Young State inmates were more likely than older inmates to have failed to complete high school or its equivalent. Over half of inmates 24 or younger had not completed the 12th grade or the GED (52%), while just over a third of those 35 or older did not have a high school diploma or GED (34% for those 35-44 and 35% for those 45 or older) (table 8).

Relatively few young inmates had pursued a post secondary education, particularly compared to older inmates. An estimated 4% of those 24 or younger, 10% of those 25 to 34, 14% of those 35 to 44, and 21% of those 45 or older had attended college or another postsecondary institution.

About a third in each age group had earned a GED. Over 7 in 10 of those earning their GED had done so in a correctional facility.

Young inmates were more likely than older ones to have participated in an educational program since their admission to prison (58% for those 24 or younger, 52% of those 25 to 34, 50% of those 34 to 44, and 47% of those 45 and older). While about 3 in 10 in all age groups had been enrolled in a vocational program, higher percentages of young inmates compared to older groups were enrolled in GED or high school courses (36% of those 24 or younger and 15% of those 45 or older).

Inmates with military service were better educated than those who had not served

About 88% of State inmates who had served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marines, or other military service and 56% who had not been in the military had completed high school or its equivalent and may have enrolled in postsecondary courses (table 9). Some of this difference can be explained because persons who have served in the Armed Forces meet high entrance requirements at enlistment and may subsequently be trained while serving in the Armed Forces.

Half of inmates with military service obtained a high school diploma and over a third passed the GED; less than a quarter who did not serve in the armed forces obtained a high school diploma and about a third a GED.

Since fewer inmates (12%) with military experience had not completed high school or a GED compared to those without military service

Table 8. Education, by age, for State prison inmates, 1997

	Percent of State prison inmates			
	Age			
	24 or younger	25-34	35-44	45 or older
Educational attainment				
8th grade or less	16.3%	12.1%	12.7%	20.7%
Some high school	35.3	27.2	21.7	13.9
GED	31.2	29.4	27.8	23.1
High school diploma	13.6	21.5	23.5	21.3
Postsecondary/ some college	3.6	8.3	11.3	14.2
College graduate or more	0.1	1.5	3.0	6.9
High school completion				
Completed high school	14.1%	25.4%	30.0%	33.4%
Earned GED	34.4	35.3	35.5	32.0
In prison/jail	27.4	26.3	25.0	22.3
Outside prison/jail	6.9	9.0	10.5	9.6
Educational programs since admission				
Total	57.8%	52.4%	49.6%	46.5%
Basic	2.5	3.0	3.2	4.3
GED/high school	35.5	23.3	19.0	15.4
College	6.4	10.1	11.4	11.6
English as a second language	0.8	1.1	1.4	1.6
Vocational	30.5	34.0	32.5	28.7
Other	2.3	2.5	2.9	2.8
Number of prison inmates	208,955	402,693	310,405	133,442

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding or inmates' participation in more than one educational program.

Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

Table 9. Education, by military service, for State prison inmates, 1997

	Percent of State prison inmates	
	Military service	
	Yes	No
Educational attainment		
8th grade or less	4.4%	15.6%
Some high school	7.4	28.1
GED	27.2	28.7
High school diploma	32.5	18.8
Postsecondary/some college	22.2	7.1
College graduate or more	6.2	1.8
High school completion		
Completed high school	49.9%	22.0%
Earned GED	38.3	34.3
In prison/jail	18.7	26.7
Outside prison/jail	19.6	7.6
Educational programs since admission		
Total	47.7%	52.5%
Basic	1.3	3.4
GED/high school	9.9	25.4
College	16.9	8.9
English as a second language	0.4	1.3
Vocational	35.6	31.7
Other	2.8	2.6
Number of prison inmates	132,178	922,715

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding or inmates' participation in more than one educational program.

Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

(44%), fewer had enrolled in high school/GED classes since their admission to prison. A tenth of those with military service and a quarter without had taken high school or GED classes since admission. About 17% with a military career and 9% without had postsecondary courses.

61% of noncitizens had not completed high school or a GED

Noncitizens, who may or may not speak English fluently, are less likely than citizens to have completed high school or its equivalent. An estimated 61% of noncitizens and 38% of inmates with U.S. citizenship had not graduated from high school or obtained a GED (table 10). Aliens were less likely than citizens to have received a high school diploma (19% versus 26%) or a GED (20% versus 36%).

Just over half of both aliens (54%) and citizens (52%) had been in an educational program since admission. About 15% of aliens were taking a course in English as a second language. A quarter of both citizens and aliens were studying at the high school level.

Inmates raised without two parents less likely to have a high school diploma or a GED

State prison inmates who grew up in homes without two parents, with an incarcerated parent, or on welfare or in subsidized housing were less likely than other inmates to have obtained a high school diploma/GED or attended a postsecondary institution.

A larger percentage of State prison inmates who were raised by a single parent or other adult, including relatives, friends, or other adults, compared to those who lived in a two parent household, failed to obtain a high school diploma or pass the GED; 43% of inmates raised by one parent, 47% by others, and 34% by both parents did not complete a high school diploma/GED (table 11).

Table 10. Education, by citizenship, for State prison inmates, 1997

	Percent of State prison inmates having citizenship in —	
	USA	Other countries
Educational attainment		
8th grade or less	12.8%	40.3%
Some high school	25.7	20.5
GED	29.2	15.6
High school diploma	20.8	14.2
Some college	9.2	5.8
College graduate or more	2.3	3.7
High school completion		
Completed high school	25.9%	18.8%
Earned GED	35.6	20.2
In prison/jail	26.2	15.0
Outside prison/jail	9.3	5.3
Educational programs since admission		
Total	51.8%	54.3%
Basic	3.0	6.1
GED/high school	23.4	24.5
College	10.2	4.4
English as a second language	0.4	15.1
Vocational	32.5	27.0
Other	2.7	1.4
Number of prison inmates	1,001,304	52,613

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding or inmates' participation in more than one educational program.

Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

Table 11. Educational attainment of State prison inmates, by characteristics of their family and background, 1997

		Educational attainment			
Background characteristics	Number	Less than high school	GED	High school diploma	Postsecondary/ some college
Lived with growing up					
Both parents	463,900	34.4%	26.9%	24.2%	14.5%
Single parent	446,873	42.7	30.6	18.0	8.8
Other	139,525	47.4	27.4	16.3	9.0
Parent ever incarcerated	190,560	43.2%	34.4%	16.1%	6.3%
Parent never incarcerated	849,170	38.8	27.3	21.5	12.5
Parent received welfare or inmate lived in public housing	427,097	46.9%	30.4%	16.1%	6.6%
Parent did not receive welfare and inmate did not live in public housing	619,605	34.5	27.4	23.5	14.7
Parent abused alcohol or drugs	332,971	38.7%	33.8%	18.5%	9.0%
Parent did not abuse alcohol or drugs	711,567	40.0	26.1	21.4	12.5
Peers engaged in illegal activity while growing up	792,560	38.7%	31.9%	19.3%	10.0%
Peers did not engage in any illegal activity	255,476	42.1	18.3	24.1	15.5

Note: Detail may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

Table 12. Educational attainment, by presence of selected disabilities, for State prison inmates, 1997

Educational attainment	Disabilities					
	None	Total*	Learning	Speech	Physical	Mental condition
8th grade or less	11.9%	17.5%	30.3%	24.8%	16.4%	17.3%
Some high school	24.9	26.4	35.8	33.9	23.9	24.1
GED	30.4	25.6	16.5	19.0	25.6	27.5
High school diploma	21.3	19.3	14.1	15.2	20.6	19.0
Some college	9.1	8.9	3.0	6.1	10.6	9.4
College graduate or more	2.3	2.3	0.2	1.0	2.9	2.7
Number of prison inmates	636,443	417,776	103,789	39,166	125,257	169,904

Note: Detail may not add to 100% due to rounding.
*Total disability includes a limiting condition, difficulty seeing, difficulty hearing, learning disability, speech disability, physical disability, and mental or emotional condition.

Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

Inmates who reported that a parent had been incarcerated were less likely to have completed 11th grade at most, compared to inmates who did not have a parent serve time in a correctional institution (43% versus 39%). Among inmates with an incarcerated parent, twice as many received a GED as their final educational achievement as received a high school diploma (34% versus 16%).

An estimated 47% of inmates who reported that they had either received welfare or lived in publicly-supported housing and 35% who received no government aid did not finish high school. Those who received public assistance were likely to obtain a GED as their highest level of attainment; 30% received a GED compared to 16% who completed high school.

66% of State prison inmates with learning disabilities did not complete high school or a GED

Among inmates who reported a disability — such as a limiting condition, difficulty seeing or hearing, a learning, speech or physical disability, or a mental or emotional condition — about 44% did not finish high school or its equivalent (table 12). Thirty-seven percent of those without a disability did not complete high school.

Two-thirds with a learning disability and 6 in 10 with a speech disability did not complete 12th grade or a GED.

47% of drug offenders did not have a high school diploma or a GED

Almost half of State prison inmates serving their sentence for selling or using illegal drugs had not graduated from high school or passed the GED (table 13). About 4 in 10 inmates serving a sentence for a violent or property offense had not finished high school. Violent offenses include homicide, sexual assault, robbery, and assault, and property crimes include burglary, larceny/theft, motor vehicle theft, and fraud. An estimated 42% of those in prison for a public-order offense — primarily weapons, obstruction of justice, and violations of supervised release — did not complete high school or its equivalent.

Table 13. Educational attainment, by offense, for State prison inmates, 1997

Educational attainment	Offense			
	Violent	Property	Drug	Public-order
8th grade or less	14.9%	12.0%	15.0%	14.7%
Some high school	22.3	25.9	31.6	27.0
GED	32.0	30.1	21.1	25.1
High school diploma	20.1	19.8	21.1	21.2
Postsecondary/some college	8.6	9.6	8.9	9.4
College graduate or more	2.2	2.5	2.3	2.5
Number of prison inmates	492,398	229,262	215,644	102,707

Note: Detail may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

Inmate unemployment before admission varied with education

Approximately 38% of inmates who completed 11 years or less of school were not working before entry to prison (table 14). Unemployment was lower for those with a GED (32%), a high school diploma (25%), or education beyond high school (21%). About 20% without a high school diploma, 19% with a GED, 14% with a high school diploma, and 13% with training beyond high school were not looking for work.

Official labor statistics exclude persons not looking for work. Using that definition, the unemployment rate for State prison inmates at admission was 22% for those with less than a high school diploma, 15% for those with a high school diploma/GED, and 9% with education beyond high school. Of all inmates, 17% were unemployed at admission. From 1990 to 1997 when 9 in 10 inmates entered prison, national unemployment ranged from 7.5% in 1992 to 4.9% in 1997. In 1997 unemployment in the general population was 8.1% for those 25 or older without a high school diploma/GED, 4.3% for high school graduates, and 2.6% for those educated beyond high school. (See: <http://www.bls.gov/cps/#empstat> tables 1 and 7.)

Better educated inmates were more likely to receive wage income. While 57% of those with less than a high school education received wages, 76% with a postsecondary education had wage income. Those without a high school diploma/GED were more likely than those with training after high school to have income from family or friends (20% versus 12%), or from welfare (11% versus 8%). A seventh of those with some postsecondary training and almost a third without a high school diploma had lived with persons who received government assistance.

Less educated inmates more likely than more educated to be recidivists

State prison inmates without a high school diploma and those with a GED were more likely to have a prior sentence than those with a diploma or some college or other postsecondary courses. About 77% who did not complete high school or a GED, 81% with a GED, 71% who finished high school, and 66% with some college were recidivists (table 15).

Less educated inmates were more likely than those with more education to have been sentenced as a juvenile. Approximately 40% without a high school diploma, 45% with a GED, 26% with a high school diploma, and 21%

Table 14. Economic and life style characteristics prior to admission, by educational attainment, for State prison inmates, 1997

	Percent of State prison inmates			
	Less than high school diploma	GED	High school diploma	Post-secondary/ some college
Employment in month before arrest[a]				
Full time	47.7%	56.4%	63.8%	69.9%
Part time	14.8	11.9	11.3	9.0
Looking for work	17.3	13.1	11.0	7.8
Not looking for work	20.2	18.6	13.9	13.2
Income sources in month before arrest				
Wages	57.1%	64.4%	70.7%	75.9%
Illegal sources	23.3	32.3	24.4	25.9
Family/friends	19.8	20.8	15.9	12.1
Transfer payments	18.4	12.7	14.1	14.8
Welfare	11.0	7.8	7.7	7.5
Supplemental Security Income or Social Security	7.4	3.8	5.3	5.4
Compensation payments	1.5	2.1	2.5	3.6
Investments	0.5	1.4	1.6	7.7
Other[b]	1.4	2.1	2.6	6.9
Personal income in month before arrest				
Less than $1,000	63.3%	51.7%	47.4%	32.7%
$1,000 to $1,999	21.6	25.9	29.5	28.7
$2,000 to $4,999	8.9	13.2	14.6	24.8
$5,000 or more	6.3	9.2	8.5	13.8
Homeless in year before admission	11.6%	10.6%	10.0%	8.2%
Number of persons in household				
Lived alone	16.5%	16.9%	20.7%	25.1%
Lived with one other person	17.7	21.5	23.0	24.2
Household totaled 3 to 5 persons	49.8	50.8	47.6	43.5
Household totaled 6 or more	16.0	10.8	8.7	7.2
Lived with persons who received welfare	31.5%	24.5%	19.3%	14.2%

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding or inmates had more than one income source.
[a]Excludes inmates not free at least 1 month before arrest.
[b]Includes pension, alimony, educational assistance, and other income sources.
Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

Table 15. Current and prior sentences, by educational attainment, for State prison inmates, 1997

	Percent of State prison inmates			
Current and prior sentences	Less than high school diploma	GED	High school diploma	Post-secondary/ some college
First time offender	22.6%	18.8%	28.7%	33.8%
For violent offense	12.7	13.8	18.6	20.8
For other offense	10.0	5.0	10.1	13.0
Prior sentences as a juvenile	40.1	45.2	26.3	20.7
To incarceration	18.8	21.8	11.6	9.7
To probation only	21.3	23.4	14.7	11.1
Prior sentences as an adult only	37.3	36.0	45.0	45.4
To incarceration	26.0	26.0	30.5	31.7
To probation only	11.3	10.0	14.5	13.7
Number of prison inmates	417,338	299,959	215,281	119,002

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding.
Source: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

with some college had prior sentences as a juvenile either to a facility or probation. About 1 in 5 without a high school diploma or with a GED and 1 in 10 with a diploma or some college had been incarcerated as a juvenile.

Methodology

The following data sets were used in this report.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Surveys

For a description of methods for these surveys see the following BJS publications:

Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997 and 1991	*Survey of State Prison Inmates*, 1991, NCJ 136949 3/93; *Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997* NCJ 172871 1/99
Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 1996 and 1989	*Profile of Jail Inmates, 1989*, NCJ 129097 4/91; *Profile of Jail Inmates, 1996*, NCJ 164620 11/98
1995 Survey of Adults on Probation	*Characteristics of Adults on Probation*, 1995, NCJ 164267 12/9.
Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities, 1995 and 2000	*Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities, 1995*, NCJ 164266 8/9.
Census of Jails, 1999	*Census of Jails, 1999*, NCJ 186633 9/01.

National Adult Literacy Survey

The National Adult Literacy Survey, sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics, was conducted in 1992 to assess literacy skills in the general population and background characteristics related to those skills. A four-stage stratified area sample was used to select respondents 16 years of age and older from the noninstitutional population in the United States. Black and Hispanic respondents were sampled at a higher rate than the remainder of the population in order to increase their representation in the sample. Data collection instruments included the screener, designed to enumerate household members and select survey respondents, a background questionnaire, and a literacy exercise booklet. The background questionnaire collected data on language and educational background, political, social, and labor force participation, literacy activities and demographic information. Respondents also took a test designed to measure their prose, document, and quantitative literacy skills. Approximately 25,000 persons, paid $20 to participate, were interviewed for the study. The response rates were as follows: 89.1% answered the screener, 81% of those answered the background questions, and 95.8% of those took the literacy test.

Current Population Survey March supplement

The Current Population Survey (CPS), sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, collects labor force data about the civilian noninstitutional population every month. In March of each year, in addition to the regular questions, educational attainment is also asked. A multistage stratified clustered sample design is used to select approximately 50,000 housing units each month for interview. Generally about 6.5% of the housing units are not interviewed in a given month due to refusals or failure to make contact with persons in the dwelling unit. Data are collected on all persons 15 and older in each household. Information is obtained each month for about 94,000 persons 15 years of age or older.

The accuracy of sample surveys

Sampling error is the variation that may occur by chance because a sample rather than a complete enumeration of the population was conducted. The sampling error, as measured by an estimated standard error, varies by the size of the estimate and the size of the base population.

Estimates of the standard error of some numbers used in this report are found in the appendix tables.

Some standard errors have been calculated to provide estimates of the sampling variability around percents in this report. For example, the 95-percent confidence interval around the percentage of State inmates whose high school graduation was their ultimate educational attainment is approximately 20.5% plus or minus 1.96 times the standard error of .4 (or 19.7% to 21.3%) (appendix table 1).

Standard errors may also be used to test the significance of the difference between two sample statistics or estimates from two surveys. This is done by pooling the standard errors of the two sample estimates.

Appendix table 1. Standard error for estimates of educational attainment

Educational attainment	Prison inmates: State 1997	State 1991	Federal 1997	Federal 1991	Local jail inmates: 1996	1989	Probationers	General population
8th grade or less	0.4%	0.5%	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%	0.7%	0.1%
Some high school	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.8	1.0	0.1
GED	0.5	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.8	...
High school diploma	0.4	0.6	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.7	1.2	0.2
Some college	0.3	0.4	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.5	1.0	0.2
College graduate or more	0.2	0.2	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.2

...Not available.

Sources: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997 and 1991; BJS, Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 1996 and 1989; BJS, Survey of Adults on Probation, 1995; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, 1997.

Appendix table 2. Standard error for estimates of educational participation

Educational programs	State 1997	State 1991	Federal 1997	Federal 1991	Local jail inmates	Probationers
Total	0.5%	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	0.6%	1.0%
Basic	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.2
GED/high school	0.5	0.6	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.7
College	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.1	0.6
English as a second language	0.1	...	0.5	...	...	...
Vocational	0.5	0.6	1.0	0.7	0.4	0.4
Other	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.6

...Not available.

Sources: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997 and 1991; BJS, Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 1996; BJS, Survey of Adults on Probation, 1995.

Appendix table 3. Standard error for estimates of participation in educational programs by educational attainment for State prison inmates

Participation in educational programs	Less than a high school diploma	GED	High school diploma	Some college or more
Total	0.9%	1.0%	1.2%	1.6%
Basic	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2
GED/High school	0.8	0.9	0.5	0.5
College	0.1	0.8	0.8	1.3
English as a second language	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Vocational	0.7	1.0	1.1	1.5
Other	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.6

Sources: BJS, Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997.

The standard error of the difference between State and Federal inmates who earned a high school diploma as their top educational achievement would be 0.8% (or the square root of the sum of the squared standard errors for each group). The 95-percent confidence interval around the difference would be 1.96 times 0.8% (or 1.5%). Since the difference of 6.5% (27.0% minus 20.5%) is greater than 1.5%, the difference would be considered statistically significant.

For additional documentation, questionnaires, and the data for BJS surveys, see<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/bjs.html#siscf> for the prison inmate surveys, <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/bjs.html#silj> for the jail inmate surveys, <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/bjs.html#sap> for the survey of probationers, <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/bjs.html#csfacf> for the prison censuses, and <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/bjs.html#njc> for the jail census. See <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/analysis/resources.asp> for data and documentation for the National Adult Literacy Survey, and <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/educ-attn.html> for tables from the Current Population Survey on educational attainment.

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This report in portable document format and in ASCII, its tables, and related statistical data are available at the BJS World Wide Web Internet site: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>

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